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Written Testimony in Opposition to HB 5447 – An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Auditors of Public Accounts Concerning Private Providers of Special Education

To Members of the Education Committee:

I am a resident of Suffield and a parent of two children with disabilities.

Although there are some pieces of HB 5447 with which I agree, other sections are a disaster, and so I am asking you to oppose the bill until it can be overhauled with input from advocates for children who could be helped or harmed by this bill.

My primary concern is with the section that says that the state shall develop a rate schedule for the amount that may be charged by a private provider of special education services, including a percentage limitation on the amount that may be allocated for administrative costs. The problem with this cookie-cutter approach is that it is likely to dramatically change the types of services that schools are able to provide, assuming these prices would be fixed at a rate that they could even stay open for business.

I care about this deeply, as my son's private special education school—one that is more expensive than average—saved his life. My son has autism, was depressed and anxious, and had been out of school for months. His public high school was simply not able to meet his needs. He needed 1:1 instruction with a certified special education teacher. He needed a quiet nurturing environment. He needed transition services that were not just one-size-fits-all but that allowed him to explore areas of interest.

Absolutely, it would have been cheaper for him to go to another private school that did not provide the level of support he needed. But the cost to society would have been high—he would not be able to stay in school; he would have had no skills to be able to work; he would be home with nothing to do, day after day; and he would be dependent on public funding for income for the rest of his life. Without his private school, his life would be very different, and his world would be much smaller, much darker.

When considering this bill, which I hope you will oppose, consider that private schools have a wide range of services—some offer programming for students in small groups, some offering instruction 1:1, some with Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) on staff to serve no more than five students, some have one BCBA to serve the whole school, some have no BCBA at all, some students need speech/language services (often added on to tuition), and some do not, etc. And some programs are so individualized and require so much coordination that they require

more administrative support than others. Fixing a rate for schools across the board simply makes no sense.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Brian Rucci